



“I will insist that the Hebrews have done more to civilize men than any other nation. If I were an atheist, I should still believe that fate had ordained the Jews to be the most essential instrument for civilizing nations.”

President John Adams

Moses The Lawgiver

According to renowned Harvard Professor of Legal History, Harold J. Berman, “The portion of the Hebrew Scriptures called the Ten Commandments, or the Decalogue, is an integral part of the legal heritage of Western Civilization.” While scholars may debate the extent of the influence of the Decalogue, there is no debating the multitude of presidential

and judicial references to the Ten Commandments as a source and symbol of Law, routine popular invocation of them as a paradigm of Rules, and frequent governmental depiction of them in public buildings, especially places where laws are made and justice administered. As Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens has noted, the U.S. Supreme

Court “has subscribed to the view that the Ten Commandments influenced the development of Western legal thought.”

Sources: Brief of *Amicus Curiae* American Center for Law and Justice, cited in *Van Orden v. Perry*, 545 U.S. 677, 712,n. 9 (2005) (Stevens, J. dissenting).

Illustration: *Moses Smashing the Tables of the Law*, by Rembrandt van Rijn (1659, Oil on canvas)